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IAMBIC COMPOSITION OF SOPHOCLES

BY ISAAC FLAGG

IN iambic composition, pure and simple, Sophocles is superior to Aeschylus and, generally, to Euripides. It is not the purpose of the present study to establish the fact of this superiority, nor to discuss the nature of it, but to trace briefly the outlines of the art in its highest concrete manifestation, with some indication of guiding principles.

The merits of the iambic trimeter verse as an instrument of dramatic expression are best brought to view by a comparison with the trochaic tetrameter. First, as an ascending rhythm, by virtue of its anacrustic character, the iambic movement is *λεκτικώτερον*, better suited to discourse or dialogue, than the trochaic. The singing effect is less obtrusive, and in continuous composition the anacrusis helps the fusion or overflow of one verse into another by muffling the metrical pause between them. At the same time, the iambic can be readily shifted to a trochaic movement, while the trochaic verse itself is not equally flexible. Again, the trimeter, as *στίχος μονόκωλος*, has, in reality, a longer reach than the tetrameter, which is dicolic; for the analogue of the trochaic monostich is the iambic distich, a double metrical period of six measures, against four in the trochaic verse. Furthermore, precisely because it has no distinct composite structure, the trimeter breaks with facility at any point, though more readily by diaeresis (between the feet, anacrustic scheme) than by caesura. On all accounts, while trochaic composition is comparatively metre-bound, with feeble capacities of pause-melody and harmonious modulation, the iambic trimeter exhibits in this regard a high degree of freedom and power.

For convenience of exposition we may assume rhetorical types of the iambic trimeter of three sorts, *complete*, *partial*, and *linked*. Complete types consist of whole verses; partial types, of parts of a verse; linked types, of a part of one verse and a part of the whole of another. Each sort is illustrated in the following period:

- (A) *O.T.* 1223 ὦ γῆς μέγιστα τῆσδ' αἰεὶ τιμώμενοι |
 οἱ' ἔργ' ἀκούσισθ' | οἷα δ' εἰσόψισθ' | ὅσον δ'
 ἀρείσθε πίνθος | εἵπερ ἐγγενῶς ἔτι
 τῶν Λαβδακίων ἐντρέπεσθε δωμάτων.

The complete types are the monostich and the distich. The former is the normal type, the unit of reference or verse-standard, by which the composition is everywhere governed. The latter is metrically double, but the importance of its rhetorical unity is clearly seen in certain combinations.

- (B) *O. C.* 728 ἄνδρες χθονὸς τῆσδ' εὐγενεῖς οἰκήτορες |
 ὁρῶ τιν' ὑμᾶς ὁμμάτων εἰληφότας
 φόβον νεώρη τῆς ἐμῆς ἐπεισόδου |
 ὃν μήτ' ὀκνεῖτε μήτ' ἀφήτ' ἔπος κακόν.

The distich may be combined with monostichs or with linked and partial types, but a period of two complete distichs seems to have been avoided. By reason of its double and symmetrical nature the complete distich does not admit the closest linking, by elision or by an atonic or proclitic or strongly anticipatory word. Thus, it would be impossible to enunciate (F) 3, 4 as a rhetorical unit.

Partial types consist of any part of a verse, since rhetorical division may concur with any caesura or diaeresis. A distinctive character is sometimes assumed by those formed by the second, less often the third, diaeresis, when a stichomythy is accelerated by dividing each verse of a series uniformly between the two interlocutors: *Aj.* 591 sqq., *El.* 1220 sqq., *O. C.* 652 sqq., *Trach.* 876 sq. The trimeter then becomes truly dicolic. Occasionally, partial types are interjected *extra trimetros*. Their principal function, however, is the one that at present concerns us, to constitute, in connexion with linked types, a varied and flexible periodic structure in continuous composition.

Linked types either include a whole verse or consist of parts of two verses. The former sort begin with the verse or end with it. Thus three verses may form a period of two cola, often symmetrically divided, as (E). Unsymmetrical, (K) 175-177. Sometimes the verse is overlapped at both ends, *Phil.* 263-265. A linked type can never include a distich; such a mass could not be enunciated as a unit, and in apparent cases the sense will be found to require division, as *Trach.* 1051 | Ἐπι-

νύων. The closest linking must be preceded by distinct division later than the third diaeresis, (A) 1224, (F) 1, 14, 17. Close linking is helped by a long syllable (and no hiatus) at the end of the verse, see (G); the *syllaba anceps* and hiatus are freely permitted, however, where the connexion in sense is as close as possible. Elision, though sparingly employed, mostly δ' and τ' (ταῦτ', *O. T.* 332), is highly significant, in revealing the intention of the poet and his view of the character of his versification.

Dramatic discourse in poetic form, while subject externally to the limitations of strict metrical law, demands the utmost spiritual freedom within that law. The episodes of a Greek play were likely to present many a situation wherein thought would predominate over feeling, and struggle against the checks and exactions of metre; and, once furnished with a tolerably pliable verse, the tragic poet would be instinctively led to make the most of his instrument, by adapting its movement and the grouping of its masses to the mood and circumstances of the *dramatis personae* with which for the time being he came to identify himself. Attic tragedy was bound to pass beyond the stage of a sublime musical drama with a background of semi-divine majestic shapes, and devote itself more congenially to the idealized presentation of pure human sentiment and reason, worthily embodied in the actions and utterances of strong and earnest characters. In Sophocles, the chief poetic representative of the Periclean age, we find a true and unobscured exemplification of its artistic qualities—a perfect balance of the formal and spiritual, successful avoidance of all extremes, complete and easy mastery of details, a flexible and subtle adjustment. For so fine an art, however, as that of organic expression of thought and feeling in metrical language, no distinct methodical rules can be formulated, no systematic theory propounded. On the positive side it is possible to do little more than to recognize the fitness of its most striking adaptations, and estimate their salient contrasts. But in so doing we are assisted by a negative principle of universal application, by which indeed the creative faculties of the artist himself are largely guided, the principle of avoiding monotony and an excess of formal symmetry. Uniformity implies an absence of personality; and the manifold structural variations of iambic composition spring immediately and naturally from the sympathy of dramatic identification.

In order to achieve a harmony of melodious and ethical effects, the extreme of pause-variation must be avoided as well as that of metrical regularity of type. The normal type of the verse should never be entirely lost sight of, or, more properly, the standard trimeter should recur often enough to be always *heard* pervading the composition, which would otherwise degenerate into rhythmical chaos. On the other hand, it is the prevalence of pause-variation that enables uniformity of measure, by contrast, to assert its true value when demanded by the ethos of the situation. Complete types, when accumulated, especially a series of monostichs, have an enumerative effect, a character of *recitative*.

- (C) *El.* 975 τίς γάρ ποτ' ἀστῶν ἢ ξένων ἡμᾶς ἰδὼν
 τοιοῖσδ' ἐπαίνοισι οὐχὶ δεξιῶσεται ||
 ἴδεσθε τῷδε τῷ κασιγιήτῳ φίλοι |
 ὦ τὸν πατρῶον οἶκον ἐξεσωσάτην |
 ὦ τοῖσιν ἐχθροῖς εὖ βεβηκόσιν ποτὲ
 ψυχῆς ἀφειδήσαντε προσστήτην φόνου ||
 τούτῳ φιλεῖν χρῆ | τῷδε χρῆ πάντας σέβειν |
 τῷδ' ἐν θ' ἑορταῖς ἐν τε πανδήμῳ πόλει
 τιμᾶν ἅπαντας εἵνεκ' ἀνδρείας χρεῶν.

Partial types formed by the second diaeresis are in keeping with the monotony. The effect is heightened in (C), as often, by the *anaphora*. Electra is an enthusiast, and in a rapt, visionary way she *chants* her future praises. An instructive contrast is afforded by a later utterance of the same heroine differently affected. It will be noted, however, that with all its agitation and irregularity of movement the following passage is not beyond the control of the normal type.

- (D) *El.* 1354 ὦ φίλτατον φῶς | ὦ μόνος σωτὴρ δόμων
 Ἀγαμέμνωνος | πῶς ἦλθες || ἢ σὺ κείνος εἰ
 ὅς τόνδε καὶ ἔσωσας ἐκ πολλῶν πόνων ||
 ὦ φίλταται μὲν χεῖρες | ἦδιστον δ' ἔχων
 ποδῶν ὑπηρέτημα | πῶς οὕτω πάλαι
 ξυνών μ' ἔλθες οὐδ' ἔφαινες | ἀλλὰ με
 λόγους ἀπώλλυς | ἔργ' ἔχων ἦδιστ' ἐμοί ||

χαῖρ' ὦ πάτερ | πατέρα γὰρ εἰσορᾶν δοκῶ |
 χαῖρ' | ἴσθι δ' ὡς μάλιστα σ' ἀνθρώπων ἐγὼ
 ἤχθηρα κάφίλῃσ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μῦϛ.

It may be remarked in connexion with complete types that the iambs of tragedy should always be recited with attention to such pauses only as must be deliberately observed in order to bring the meaning out intelligibly — pauses that can bear the test of being prolonged at will. Of purely metrical values the reader must take no account. These are sure to assert themselves duly without conscious effort, when the pronunciation is true, and to emphasize them in reading is to destroy the harmony of the composition. When the main divisions of the thought and of the metre coincide, they enforce each other; but in so far as they do not fall together, there results a double effect which is characteristic of poetic word-grouping. In the iambic trimeter the obtrusive metrical divisions are the verse-end and the second and third diaereses; and of these, when not coincident with the principal rhetorical divisions, the poet avails himself to mark the minor articulations of the thought, thus producing subtle effects of secondary emphasis. Much of the beauty of poetic form is due to this gradation and interplay of metrical and rhetorical values, and the sympathetic reader will never gratuitously interfere to disturb their just proportions.

Complete types, not accumulated, but either isolated or in brief and tolerably symmetrical combinations, are apt to occur at the opening or the close of a speech or a complex period. The verse-standard is thus duly presented at the beginning, or returned to at the end, where a calm unbroken movement is often strictly appropriate, (F) 7, 8; 19, 20. Especially the complete distich, combined with one monostich or with two, or otherwise, introduces a formal address with dignity or a certain solemnity, as (B), *Aj.* 646-649, *Ant.* 1-3, 450-452. If the opening line is broken by a vocative the effect is different, and tends to the pathetic, *Aj.* 485, *O. T.* 1. An enclosed vocative does not usually break the verse, as an initial (emphatic) vocative does, and has not the same ethos; compare *Aj.* 1 (unbroken) with *Aj.* 14. Remarkable is the beginning of the *Electra*, with the profound suggestiveness of the long initial colon:

(E)

ὦ τοῦ στρατηγήσαντος ἐν Τροίᾳ ποτὲ
 Ἀγαμέμνωνος παῖ | νῦν ἐκείν' ἐξιστί σοι
 παρόντι λεύσσειν ὦν πρόθυμος ἦσθ' αἰεί.

While the movement of complete types is iambic (anacrusic), a succession of broken verses regularly introduces a trochaic movement, since in the iambic trimeter diaeresis is far more common than caesura. Thus, paradoxically, a trochaic flow comes to be characteristic of Greek iambic discourse. This saves the trimeter (the equal in length of the English alexandrine) from a slow and labored effect that would render it unsuited to the uses of ancient tragedy, where the musical and poetic are ever liable, even in iambs, to override the purely dramatic; for with trochaic division the current of the verse is rapid, while the anacrusic break is retarding. The latter also can occur only near the beginning or the end of a line, and hence pertains to unsymmetrical periods. Anacrusic division is in fact, though less common than trochaic, the more strictly dramatic in character. Thus, the first or the second caesura may give a deliberative tone to the beginning of a speech, (K) 1, *Ant.* 998, *O. T.* 216, *Aj.* 1332, *O. C.* 1284. Similar in effect (narrative-argumentative), and comparatively frequent, is the fifth or last caesura, *El.* 558, 563, 566, 582, 587 (cf. the fourth caesura, 560, 577, 579, 593). Except with complete types, where its character is modified by the symmetry, an iambic movement is never maintained to any considerable extent without variation by the trochaic. A rare example of the dramatic ethos of iambic types is the beginning of the *Oedipus at Colonus*. The passage owes a share of its peculiar charm, I think, to the suppressed pathos under the tranquil conversational tone marked by anacrusic and unsymmetrical division.

(F)

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΤΣ.

τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος Ἀντιγόνη | τίνας
 χώρους ἀφίγμεθ' ἢ τίνων ἀνδρῶν πόλιν ||
 τίς τὸν πλανήτην Οἰδίπουν | καθ' ἡμέραν
 τὴν νῦν | σπανιστοῖς δίδεται δωρήμασιν |
 5 σμικρὸν μὲν ἐξαιτοῦντα | τοῦ σμικροῦ δ' ἔτι
 μείον φέροντα | καὶ τόδ' ἐξαρκούν ἐμοί ||
 στέργειν γὰρ αἱ πάθαι με χῶ χρόνος ξυνῶν
 μακρὸς διδάσκει καὶ τὸ γενναῖον τρίτον ||

- ἀλλ' ὦ τέκνον | θάκησιν εἴ τινα βλέπεις
 10 ἥ πρὸς βεβήλοις ἥ πρὸς ἄλσεσιν θεῶν |
 στήσόν με κἀφίδρυσον | ὥς πνυθόμεθα
 ὅπου ποτ' ἐσμέν' | μανθάνειν γὰρ ἤκομεν
 ξίνοι πρὸς ἀστών | ἄν δ' ἀκούσωμεν τελείν.

ANTIGONE.

- πάτερ ταλαίπωρ' Οἰδίπους | πύργοι μὲν οἱ
 15 πόλιν στέγουσιν | ὥς ἀπ' ὀμμάτων | πρόσσω ||
 χῶρος δ' ὁδ' ἱρὸς ὡς σάφ' εἰκάσαι | βρύων
 δάφνης ἐλάας ἀμπέλου | πνκνόπτεροι δ'
 εἴσω κατ' αὐτὸν εὐστομοῦσ' ἀηδόνες ||
 οὐ κῶλα κάμψον τοῦδ' ἐπ' ἀξίστου πέτρου |
 20 μακρὰν γὰρ ὡς γέροντι προυνστάλης ὁδόν.

The trochaic flow, ever present where the metre is much broken, varies in character according to the relative proportions of the cola, or commata; that is, according to the scale of modulation on which the pause is shifted. With (D) contrast the following example:

- (G) *Ant.* 891 ὦ τύμβος | ὦ νυμφεῖον | ὦ κατασκαφῆς
 οἴκησις αἰέφρουρος | οἱ πορεύομαι
 πρὸς τοὺς ἐμαντῆς | ὧν ἀριθμὸν ἐν νεκροῖς
 πλείστον δίδεκται Φερσέφασσ' ὀλωλότων ||
 ὧν λισθία ἔγω καὶ κάκιστα δὴ μακρῷ
 κύτειμι | πρίν μοι μοῖραν ἐξήκειν βίον.

The power of this passage is due by no means entirely to its pathos and the solemn vocalization (a key-note struck at the opening of the play), but measurably also to the melodious gradation of the trochaic types. Instead of the excited uneven movement of (D) we have here the cyclic song-like progression of a *crescendo* and *cadenza*—the fall entering with the anacrusis, 895. That the *syllaba anceps* was intentionally avoided here, I cannot doubt.

The long period or system, of complex organic unity, and of more or less compact and not unsymmetrical structure, is evolved under the influence of concentrated feeling in dramatic identification, such as the wrath that issues in invective, the intense interest of the ἀγγελος

or *ἐξάγγελος* in the thrilling tale he has to recite, the zeal and warmth of argumentative disputation or earnest appeal. The following outburst of the choleric Oedipus is succeeded by fourteen lines of loose periodic structure.

- (H) *O. T.* 380 ὦ πλοῦτε καὶ τυραννὶ καὶ τέχνῃ τέχνης
 ὑπερφέρονσα τῷ πολυζήλῳ βίῳ |
 ὅσος παρ' ὑμῖν ὁ φθόνος φυλάσσεται |
 εἰ τῇσδὲ γ' ἀρχῆς εἶνεχ' | ἦν ἐμοὶ πόλις
 δωρητὸν οὐκ αἰτητὸν εἰσεχείρισεν |
 385 ταύτης Κρίων ὁ πιστός | οὐξ ἀρχῆς φίλος |
 λάθρα μ' ὑπελθὼν ἐκβαλεῖν ἰμείρεται |
 ὑφεῖς μάγον τοιῶνδε μηχανορράφον |
 δόλιον ἀγύρτην | ὅστις ἐν τοῖς κέρδεσιν
 μόνον δίδορκε τὴν τέχνην δ' ἔφυ τυφλός.

The sweep and balance of the system lend dignity to the caustic temper. The prevalence of complete types here to be noted, and the accompanying reduction of trochaic movement, together with the comparative regularity of the breaks that do occur, distinguish such a period in character from groups like (D) or (G).

Strictly analogous to the modulation and grouping of cola to form a period is the variation exhibited in the massing of the periods themselves. Shorter and longer groups or systems succeed each other according to the natural impulsion of the thought, and a stanza-like uniformity is everywhere avoided — except in the stichomythy and distichomythy, which may be regarded as typifying the virtue of absolute symmetry in the largest complex unit of iambic composition, the episode. In a *ῥῆσις* of considerable length the brief unperiodic sentences are usually the most numerous, though in this regard, as well as in respect to closeness or looseness of texture, everything depends upon the character of the passage as a whole. Long periods, on the other hand, are of far less frequent occurrence than those of intermediate volume. There is room to present but one illustration of complex grouping, the throne speech of Creon in the *Antigone*. The long period, in which the oration culminates, authoritative confirmation of the formidable edict, is here arrived at in a deliberate way, step by step.

- (K) *Ant.* 162 ἄνδρες | τὰ μὲν δὴ πόλεος ἀσφαλῶς θεοί |
πολλῷ σάλῳ σείσαντες | ὥρθωσαν πόλιν ||
ὑμᾶς δ' ἐγὼ πομποῖσιν ἐκ πάντων δίχα
165 ἔστειλ' ἰκίσθαι | τοῦτο μὲν τὰ Λαῖον
σέβοντας εἰδὼς ἐν θρόνων αἰὲ κράτη |
τοῦτ' αὖθις | ἡνίκ' Οἰδίπους ὥρθου πόλιν
κάπῃ διώλετ' | ἀμφὶ τοὺς κείνων ἔτι
παῖδας μένοντας ἐμπέδοις φρονήμασιν ||
170 ὅτ' οὖν ἐκείνοι πρὸς διπλῆς μοίρας | μίαν
καθ' ἡμέραν ὤλοντο | παῖσαντές τε καὶ
πληγέντες αὐτόχειρι σὺν μάσματι |
ἐγὼ κράτη δὴ πάντα καὶ θρόνους ἔχω
γένους κατ' ἀγχιστεῖω τῶν ὀλωλότων ||
175 ἀμήχανον δὲ παντὺς ἀνδρὸς ἐκμαθεῖν
ψυχὴν τε καὶ φρόνημα καὶ γνῶμην | πρὶν ἂν
ἀρχαῖς τε καὶ νόμοισιν ἐντριβῆς φανῇ ||
ἐμοὶ γάρ | ὅστις πᾶσαν εὐθύνων πόλιν
μὴ τῶν ἀρίστων ἄπτεται βουλευμάτων |
180 ἀλλ' ἐκ φόβου του γλώσσαν ἐγκλήσας ἔχει |
κάκιστος εἶναι νῦν τε καὶ πάλαι δοκεῖ |
καὶ μείζον' ὅστις ἀντὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ πάτρας
φίλον νομίζει | τοῦτον οὐδαμοῦ λέγω ||
ἐγὼ γάρ | ἴστω Ζεὺς ὁ πάνθ' ὀρῶν αἰεὶ |
185 οὔτ' ἂν σιωπῆσαιμι | τὴν αἶτην ὀρῶν
στείχουσιν ἀστοῖς ἀντὶ τῆς σωτηρίας |
οὔτ' ἂν φίλον ποτ' ἄνδρα δυσμενῇ πόλεως
θείμην ἐμαντῷ | τοῦτο γινώσκων ὅτι
ἡδ' ἐστὶν ἡ σφύζουσα | καὶ ταύτης ἐπι
190 πλείοντες ὀρθῆς τοὺς φίλους ποιούμεθα ||
τοιοῖσδ' δ' ἐγὼ νόμοισι τήνδ' αὖξω πόλιν ||
καὶ νῦν ἀδελφὰ τῶνδε κηρύξας ἔχω
ἀστοῖσι | παῖδων τῶν ἀπ' Οἰδίου πέρι ||
Ἐτεοκλεία μὲν | ὅς πόλεως ὑπερμαχῶν
195 ὀλωλε τῆσδε | πάντ' ἀριστεύσας δόρει |
τάφῳ τε κρῦψαι καὶ τὰ πάντ' ἐφαγνίσαι
ἀ τοῖς ἀρίστοις ἔρχεται κάτω νεκροῖς ||

τὸν δ' αὖ ξύναιμον τοῦδε | Πολυνείκην λέγω |
 ὃς γῆν πατρῶαν καὶ θεοὺς τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς |
 200 φυγὰς κατελθὼν | ἠθέλησε μὲν πυρὶ
 πρῆσαι κατάκρας | ἠθέλησε δ' αἵματος
 κοινου πάσασθαι | τοὺς δὲ δουλῶσας ἄγειν |
 τοῦτον πόλει τῇδ' ἐκκεκῆρυκται τάφῳ
 μήτε κτερίζειν μήτε κωκυσαί τινα |
 205 ἴαν δ' ἄθραπτον | καὶ πρὸς οἰωνῶν δέμας
 καὶ πρὸς κυνῶν ἔδεστον αἰκισθέντ' ἰδεῖν ||
 τοιόνδ' ἐμὸν φρόνημα | κοῦποτ' ἔκ γ' ἐμοῦ
 τιμὴν προέξουσ' οἱ κακοὶ τῶν ἐνδίκων |
 ἀλλ' ὅστις εὖνους τῇδε τῇ πόλει | θανῶν
 210 καὶ ζῶν ὁμοίως ἐξ ἐμοῦ τιμῆσεται.